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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: PAYA ON RAUL SPEECH: FREEDOM NEEDED, NOT SHOW OF
FORCE

REF: HAVANA 23564

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Buddy Williams for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) Summary: Leading Cuban human rights activist Oswaldo Paya of the Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) has responded to General Raul Castro's December 2 speech by saying the Cuban people need basic freedoms, not a show of military force. Paya, founder of the Varela Project signature drive for reforms, met with us December 5. He shared a 12-paragraph statement he drafted following Fidel Castro's birthday and the Armed Forces anniversary day events. The press statement, titled "So Cuba Can Live Free," says citizens will only be free when they can express their ideas without fear; travel without restrictions; own businesses; form political parties; elect their representatives; and when all political prisoners are released. Paya told us he doubted Raul Castro's offer to negotiate with the United States was made in good faith. He also said he would push ahead with the Varela Project. Paya is not alone in dismissing Raul's speech. Martha Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society said it amounted to "a mouse (Raul) trying to scare a lion (the United States)." End Summary.

12. (C) Oswaldo Paya shared with us a statement his MCL released after the big December 2 military parade and speech by General Raul Castro. (Partial, unofficial translation:) "At today's celebration, the government again showed the army's force, the glory and memory of past victories, a massive demonstration of support, and the permanence of power -- but not liberty. Without liberty, which is the inalienable right of all people, it cannot be said that (the Government's) power is derived from the people. Whether Cuba lives free depends on us Cubans, and those who govern."

13. (C) Paya told Poloff that the MCL included in the statement a reference to Raul Castro's offer to negotiate with the United States only because he didn't want the MCL to be seen opposing dialogue. The passage reads: "We believe that the problems and differences between the Cuban Government and the United States, and with whatever other nation, should be resolved through negotiation, on the basis of mutual respect." However, Paya told us that he doubts that the offer was made in good faith.

14. (C) The statement also takes the regime to task for denying the people the right to change their government. "In Latin America, imperfect democracy has given the people the right and the opportunity to decide at the polls on profound changes needed in their societies, to make them more just. In the United States, imperfect democracy gives the people the chance to express at the ballot box their nonconformity

and desire for changes. In Cuba, the communist system -- which claims to be a perfect democracy -- denies people their right to bring about change at the polls... This right, to express a desire for change, is one that the Varela Project defends. For this reason, we will continue to promote a referendum (on reforms), until in the law and in practice the rights of all Cubans are guaranteed."

¶5. (C) Paya is not alone in dismissing Raul Castro's speech. Martha Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society told us December 4 that in her view, the speech amounted to "a mouse (Raul) trying to scare a lion (the United States)." Dissident economist Oscar Espinosa Chepe, for his part, said the little homage paid to Fidel Castro on December 2 indicates that his end is near.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Paya is admirably firm in demanding democratic action from the "new" Government of Raul Castro. Paya is worried, and even upset, that others in the human rights community are not making clear what the regime would have to do to get them to start intra-Cuban negotiations. He fears, as we do, a situation in which Raul Castro could release some political prisoners and announce a minor economic reform or two just to buy enough time to consolidate his power.

WILLIAMS